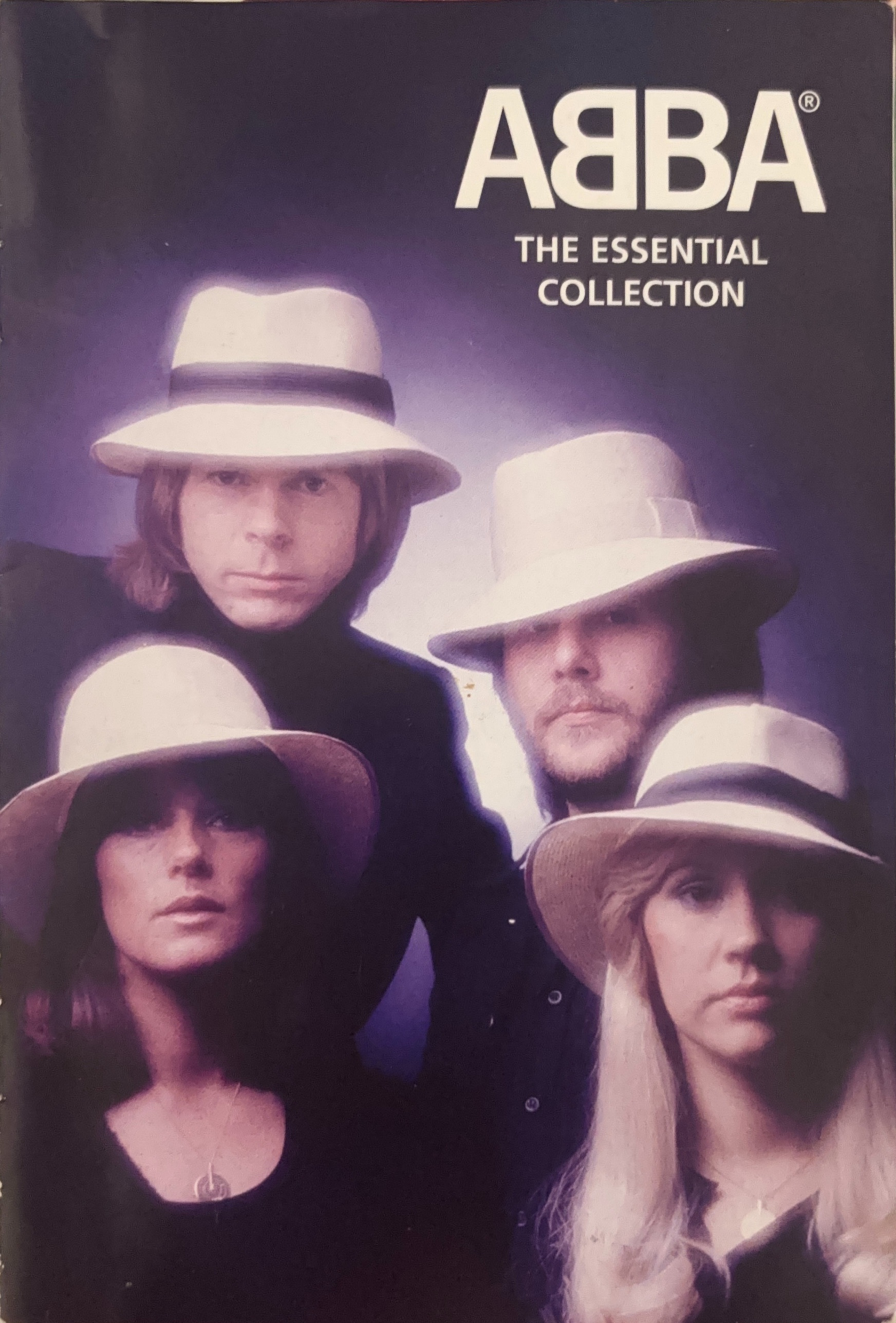
ABBA®

THE ESSENTIAL COLLECTION



Although the practice of presenting artists performing their songs in shorts film has been around for decades, it was only when MTV started in the USA in 1981 that music videos turned into one of the most important tools in the marketing of popular music artists. By that time, ABBA had already been making film clips on a regular basis for seven years. This DVD collects all the group's official promo clips, produced and distributed by their record company Polar Music between 1974 and 1982, plus a few bonus selections.

ABBA's very first promo clips, as these short films were called at the time, were those for 'Waterloo' and 'Ring Ring', made in the summer of 1974. For ABBA, the main attraction with producing promo clips was that they could minimise their travelling. It was especially complicated for them to go to countries such as Australia and New Zealand, which at the time would mean a 30-hour plane trip. The group and their manager, Stig Anderson, were well aware that one single television performance in the right show could mean easier and quicker exposure to more people than could be reached through even the most ambitious tour.

"We had a look at something called a 'promotion film' from a record company in America," recalled Björn. "It was one camera, one shot; very badly done. We said it must be possible to do a thing like this but much, much better." The director they entrusted with the task for these first clips was a budding film maker called Lasse Hallström. Today, he is a famous Hollywood director, with films such as My Life As A Dog, What's Eating Gilbert Grape and The Cider House Rules to his credit. At the time, he had a lot of experience in the "pop film" area, dating back to the 1960s when he used to produce clips for television featuring Swedish and international pop acts.

Hallström was used to operating on a minuscule budget, something that came in handy when the ABBA clips were made. The group's record company, Polar Music, didn't wish to spend too much money on these films – as, indeed, did very few record companies in the 1970s. It is to the director's credit that he usually managed to create some kind of visual excitement despite these less than favourable production circumstances. Hallström is responsible for the majority of the films included in this collection.

The films for 'Waterloo' and 'Ring Ring' were both fairly straightforward performances of the songs, with very little in the way of effects or editing tricks. However, this was all changed in

conjunction with the group's third album – released in 1975 and simply titled ABBA – when no less than four songs received the film clip treatment: 'Mamma Mia', 'SOS', 'Bang-A-Boomerang' and 'I Do, I Do, I Do, I Do, I Do'.

In a sense, these films – all of which were made in studios and outdoor locations in the chilly Stockholm Spring – are perhaps the four most important clips in the entire history of ABBA. It was here that Lasse Hallström came up with many of the visual characteristics that would come to define ABBA's video image. 'Mamma Mia' introduced the frequently used close-up shots of two members, one of whom was shown in profile, and these films were also where he started grouping the four individuals in different combinations of pairs, contrasting one against the other.

These clips were crucial in helping ABBA achieve their extraordinary breakthrough in Australia. The country had just introduced colour television when the films for 'I Do, I Do, I Do, I Do, I Do' and 'Mamma Mia' were shown on the popular television show Countdown in August 1975. This exposure led to a frenzied interest in the group and a consecutive 14-week run at number one in the singles chart for those two songs plus 'SOS'. This success proved most convincingly that sending film clips to far-off countries was a very effective way to make an impression without having to spend time on long and tiresome trips.

With the hit success of their 1975 singles, ABBA firmly established themselves as a worldwide pop phenomenon, and they built on this success with their first single of 1976: 'Fernando'. Accompanied by yet another Hallström-directed film clip, this song alone spent 14 weeks at the top of the Australian charts. Ironically, the director himself doesn't believe he got things quite right with the 'Fernando' clip, feeling that it's much too static. Despite Hallström's reservations, both song and film were popular and quite frequently screened on television.

ABBA's next single was 'Dancing Queen', where the dance rhythms of the song inspired a clip set in a discotheque environment. Shooting took place at the Fattighuset night club in Stockholm. 'Dancing Queen' was the first single from ABBA's fourth album, Arrival, and went on to become the most popular and fondly remembered of all ABBA songs.

The follow-up to this smash hit was 'Money, Money, Money'. By way of contrast to 'Fernando', this clip is actually Lasse Hallström's favourite of his work with ABBA. "It was consistent with the lyrics and the music," he remarked many years later. "I loved editing my films to fit the music, to emphasize the rhythm and the idea of the music, to provide musical support and not just tell a story."

The third single from Arrival was 'Knowing Me, Knowing You', accompanied by a clip filmed in wintry Stockholm. 'Knowing Me, Knowing You' exposed a prominent feature in ABBA's clips, also leaving its mark on the earlier 'SOS', namely the acting out of desolation and regret over love gone wrong. No doubt these visuals helped underscore the sadness that was fighting for space with the affirmative, joyous sounds that essentially constituted the dominating factor in ABBA's music.

In most territories, 'That's Me' was simply the B-side of 'Dancing Queen', but in Japan it was felt that this should be a single all of its own. A promo film was hastily put together in the summer of 1977 – featuring newly filmed scenes of Agnetha and Frida miming to the song, edited together with bits from older clips – and dispatched to Japan.

The first single from the group's fifth LP, ABBA – The Album, was 'The Name Of The Game'.

Released in October, the clip featured the group playing a board game at Björn and Agnetha's home. No sooner had this song left the charts than it was followed by 'Take A Chance On Me'. The single was accompanied by a playful film, itself heavily parodied by synth duo Erasure in the video for their 1992 cover version of the song.

In April 1978, ABBA produced films for a further three selections from The Album: 'Eagle', 'Thank You For The Music' – which made up the A- and B-side, respectively, of a single – and the album track 'One Man, One Woman'. It was the first time the group appeared in promo clips made directly on video tape, giving them a strong "televisual" feel.

By this time, ABBA had already started work on their next album, Voulez-Vous. The first song to be released from those sessions was the energetic 'Summer Night City', where the clip showed Stockholm at its most beautiful and inviting, with warm summer nights when the sun almost never sets.

The next single from the Voulez-Vous sessions was 'Chiquitita', released in January 1979. For this song, Lasse Hallström never made a film clip. Instead a straightforward performance of the song, hastily taped in conjunction with the making of a television special in Switzerland, was used as the official promo clip – look out for the "intruder" that accidentally walks into the frame towards the end of the clip! Mercifully, for the next two singles, Hallström was in charge again, re-creating a discotheque environment to reflect the dance beats of 'Does Your Mother Know' and 'Voulez-Vous'.

In conjunction with their tour of North America and Europe, which started in September 1979, ABBA recorded a brand new single, 'Gimme! Gimme! Gimme! (A Man After Midnight)'. Lasse Hallström directed a film clip for the song at ABBA's Polar Music Studios in central Stockholm, where their music was created during the last half of their career. The clip offers a rare glimpse of how it might have looked when the group recorded their songs.

A few months into 1980, ABBA were well on their way with the Super Trouper album. Around the same time, photographer Anders Hanser wanted to put together a slide show presentation of the pictures he had taken during ABBA's recent tour of North America and Europe. He asked the group if they had something he could use as a soundtrack, and was given a brand new, still unreleased recording, entitled 'On And On And On'.

Several months later, towards the end of 1980, the song was released as a single in a limited number of countries. A promo film was needed to go with it, and it was a natural choice to use Hanser's slide show for this purpose. There was also an added bonus connected to this decision: the version that Hanser used featured an extra verse (three minutes into the song) that had been edited out when the track was issued on record. It is present here for your listening pleasure.

The very first recording from the sessions to be released as a single, however, was 'The Winner Takes It All', in July 1980. The song was coloured by the marital split between Agnetha and Björn, and Lasse Hallström went along with this theme: in the promo clip, Agnetha acts the part of an abandoned, lonely woman.

In the beginning of November, the Super Trouper album was released. The title track was issued as a single – its promo clip was made in conjunction with the making of the album sleeve. Both the film and the LP cover were among ABBA's most ambitious, with the group being surrounded by dozens of dressed-up friends and genuine circus performers.

At the same time, party scenes were also filmed for the clip that accompanied the song 'Happy New Year'. These scenes were later married together with melancholy "after the party" sequences filmed in Lasse Hallström's apartment in central Stockholm. 'Happy New Year' was never released as a worldwide single, however, so the clip was not widely screened at the time.

A year later, ABBA's eighth and final studio album, The Visitors, was released. It had taken some time to decide on the first single from the album sessions. A film clip was made for the song 'When All Is Said And Done', indicating that this might have been considered a suitable choice. However, this was not to be. Instead, 'One Of Us' became the first official single from the album. For the video, Lasse Hallström cast Agnetha in the role of a woman moving into a new flat, presumably after the break-up from her man, as depicted in the lyrics.

In January 1982, Lasse Hallström directed his last clip for ABBA. 'Head Over Heels' was the second official single from the recent album, and was largely filmed in central Stockholm. Frida acted the part of the high society woman dragging her exhausted "husband", played by Björn, in and out of various shops and boutiques. Hallström even inserted his own, Hitchcock-style appearance in this humorous clip – watch out for the scene where Frida bumps into a man in a blue jacket.

Back in 1982 ABBA were slowly winding down, eventually reaching a point where they decided to take a break from the group – ultimately never to get back together again. A year earlier, Frida and Benny's marriage had ended in ABBA's second divorce: the group that had come together as two couples in love was now based on no more than friendship and professional respect, and the members could feel the ABBA energy fading away.

Only two more singles were released, and accordingly only two further film clips were made before the group called it a day. For these films, they turned to the director/cinematographer team of Kjell Sundvall and Kjell-Åke Andersson, both of whom would later go on to successful careers as movie directors in Sweden.

The first clip the pair made for ABBA, 'The Day Before You Came', was one of the group's most ambitious – it was clear that the video age had started, when the music industry began spending more money on this kind of promotion. For instance, scenes of a train travelling over a bridge in Stockholm were filmed from a helicopter, an extravagance previously unheard of in ABBA's promo clip productions.

The second clip for the Sundvall/Andersson team – and also the very last ABBA video – was 'Under Attack', filmed in a warehouse in the southern parts of Stockholm in November 1982. As if to signal that ABBA were ready to say farewell, the video ended with the four members walking away in the distance, their backs to the camera.

When the ABBA revival began for real in the early 1990s, the clips were revisited, perhaps receiving more screenings than they did at the height of the group's fame. As a contrast against the more streamlined, choreographed, million dollar budget videos of the past few decades, many of ABBA's more modest clips constitute a refreshing reminder of what can actually be achieved with just a little imagination and enthusiasm. Certainly, ABBA's glammy costumes and general 1970s appearance also caused a few affectionate smiles all these decades later, contributing greatly to the attraction of the clips. Press the "play" button and enjoy!

Six additional selections have been included on this DVD. Two of them, 'Conociéndome, Condociéndote' and 'Gracias Por La Música' see their first-ever DVD release. Made to promote ABBA's Spanish langauage album Gracias Por La Música in 1980, these versions of 'Knowing Me, Knowing You' and 'Thank You For The Music' were only screened in Spanish-language territories at the time and have only rarely been seen since then. The other Spanish-language promo clips are: 'Estoy Soñando' ('I Have A Dream'), 'Felicidad' ('Happy New Year') and 'No Hay A Quien Culpar' ('When All Is Said And Done').

Finally, 'The Last Video', a short film featuring the four ABBA members as Muppet-style dolls, was made in 2004 by director Calle Åstrand. The film, which also features cameo appearances by the four real-life ABBA members, was originally broadcast during the Eurovision Song Contest semi-final in May 2004, as a celebratory nod to the 30th anniversary of ABBA's victory in the contest.

MUSIC & LYRICS: Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus
Except: Ring Ring (B. Andersson / S. Anderson / B. Ulvaeus / N. Sedaka / P. Cody), Waterloo, Honey, Honey, I Do, I Do, I Do, I Do, I Do, SOS, Mamma Mia, Bang-A-Boomerang, Fernando, Dancing Queen, Knowing Me, Knowing You, That's Me and The Name of The Game (B. Andersson / S. Anderson / B. Ulvaeus), Estoy Soñando, Gracias Por La Música, Felicidad, No Hay A Quién Culpar (B. Andersson / B. Ulvaeus / B. McCluskey / M. McCluskey), Conociéndome, Conociéndote (B. Andersson / S. Anderson / B. Ulvaeus / B. McCluskey / M. McCluskey)

ALL VIDEOS PRODUCED BY: Lasse Hallström
Except: Chiquitita by BBC, On And On And On, pictures by Anders Hanser, programmed by Peder Wistedt, The Day Before You Came and Under Attack by Kjell Sundvall and Kjell-Åke Andersson, Conociéndome, Conociéndote and Gracias Por La Música by Polar Music, The Last Video a radical media production.

ALL SONGS PUBLISHED BY: Universal/Union Songs AB
Except Chiquitita, by Music For Unicef

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1. WATERLOO
2. RING RING
3. MAMMA MIA
4. SOS
5. BANG-A-BOOMERANG
6. I DO, I DO, I DO, I DO, I DO
7. FERNANDO
8. DANCING QUEEN
9. MONEY, MONEY, MONEY
10. KNOWING ME, KNOWING YOU
11. THAT'S ME
12. THE NAME OF THE GAME
13. TAKE A CHANCE ON ME
14. EAGLE
15. ONE MAN, ONE WOMAN
16. THANK YOU FOR THE MUSIC
17. SUMMER NIGHT CITY
18. CHIQUITITA
19. DOES YOUR MOTHER KNOW
20. VOULEZ-VOUS
21. GIMME! GIMME! GIMME! (A MAN AFTER MIDNIGHT)
22. ON AND ON AND ON
23. THE WINNER TAKES IT ALL
24. SUPER TROUPER
25. HAPPY NEW YEAR
26. WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE
27. ONE OF US
28. HEAD OVER HEELS
29. THE DAY BEFORE YOU CAME
30. UNDER ATTACK
31. ESTOY SOÑANDO
32. CONOCIÉNDOME, CONOCIÉNDOTE
33. GRACIAS POR LA MÚSICA
34. FELICIDAD
35. NO HAY A QUIÉN CULPAR
36. THE LAST VIDEO

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